



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on August 31, 2011

Wisconsin Labor Day Parades GOP Ban Sparks Outcry

The decision of local union bosses to ban Republican politicians from this year's labor-day parade in Wausau, Wisconsin, is sparking nationwide attention and criticism, adding even more fuel to the political turmoil in the state following months of partisan battles over the power of government-sector unions.

In addition to the national outcry from activists on both sides, locals are fighting back as well. Wausau Mayor Jim Tipple, who is not affiliated with either party, said the union organizers would have to foot the bill for the parade themselves if their decision to bar the GOP stands.



"The banning of a political party from participation at any event co-sponsored by the City is against public policy and not in the best interest of all the citizens of the City of Wausau. And therefore, we encourage the event organizer to invite all interested parties, or reimburse the city for other costs," the Mayor said in a statement.

In an interview with the press, he was even more blunt. "This is not a political rally, it's a parade, for God's sake," Tipple [told](#) Reuters. Pointing out that tax money normally pays for the event, the Mayor said excluding Republicans "flies in the face of public policy."

The unions will be forced to reimburse the city for around \$2,000 if they do not reconsider. The cost would cover police, insurance and several other expenses.

Republican politicians affected by the ban also criticized the union decision in the national press. Rep. Sean Duffy (R - Wis.), for example, [told](#) Fox News during an interview that he thought the partisanship was going too far and that the ban was "petty."

"It's been a little contentious in Wisconsin, but we all just went through a whole recall election and the folks in Wausau, they're sick of partisanship," said Rep. Duffy, who represents the district in Washington and has participated in the parade in past years. "They want to see people start working together. They want to see all the bickering set aside."

Striking a bi-partisan tone in stark contrast with the attitude of local union leaders, Duffy repeatedly emphasized cooperation between parties to create jobs. And the people of Wausau and even some union members were opposed to the GOP ban, the Congressman added, saying he hoped union officials would reconsider next year.

"I think in Wisconsin it has become so divisive, we have to start working to bridge that divide and this doesn't go to that end," concluded Duffy, who was not involved in the recent reforms adopted by the state government. "We almost have to laugh at it."

Other excluded lawmakers were upset by the ban, too, also taking their case to the media. "I'm a worker, you're a worker, we're not represented by unions. It's not appropriate for the citizens of the city



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of Wausau to be deprived of contact with their elected representatives," [said](#) State Sen. Pam Galloway. "When I go to these parades, I try to talk with people before the parade actually starts."

Local party officials cited in news reports were highly critical as well. And some conservative commentators actually took a more hostile approach. Jim Hoft of Gateway Pundit, for example, reported the news under the headline "[Union Thugs Ban Republican Rep. Sean Duffy From Their Labor Day Parade.](#)"

Ed Morrissey of the Hot Air blog [wrote](#) that "it looks like the unions will be sore losers for some time in Wisconsin." He even suggested an investigation into the unions and called their decision a "display of incredible pettiness.. petulance and immaturity" that "is not likely to help the union cause."

Conservative outrage was to be expected. But even some leftist groups attacked the ban on elected Republicans, albeit for different reasons. "This decision by parade organizers, though done with the best intentions, is ultimately short-sighted and should be reversed," [noted](#) the group Defend Wisconsin in an editorial. "Parades are the times for us to come together to celebrate, not be an opportunity to further divide us."

Despite the massive backlash, however, union bosses are standing firm. In a [statement](#) defending the move, Marathon County Labor Council AFL-CIO President Randy Radtke said it should not be surprising that organizers refused to invite elected officials who stood up to union demands or "stood idly by" while their party did so.

"The Wausau Labor Day Parade is a time to celebrate the working men and women of Wisconsin. It is not a political event or stop on the campaign trail," he claimed. "It is a time for working families to come together to celebrate their hard work and a time where we recognize the labor movement for all they have given us."

In an [editorial](#) published on August 31 by the Wausau *Daily Herald*, Radtke praised organized labor's role in ushering in a broad array of unconstitutional legislation such as federal minimum-wage laws and the Occupational Safety and Health Act. He also attacked the GOP.

"I certainly hope Republicans won't try to repeal all of these things, but at the same time, most have opposed raising the minimum wage," he complained. But, if the GOP changes its tune, "we'll be glad to cheer for them at the Labor Day parade."

Union bosses are still furious about losing a battle earlier this year over the so-called "[budget-repair bill.](#)" Wisconsin became a national battleground and taxpayers prevailed.

In an effort to rein in [multi-billion dollar budget deficits, the Republican-backed legislation](#) made union membership optional for public servants while limiting collective-bargaining privileges. It also required slightly higher employee contributions toward government workers' generous health and pension plans. Public-sector employees [staged weeks of massive demonstrations](#) in response to the proposal. Democrat state senators, whose campaigns rely heavily on union funds, fled the state to block the bill. But the law passed anyway, and union bosses vowed retaliation.

First, anti-reform activists attempted to replace a conservative Justice on the state Supreme Court. They failed.

Then came a [historic recall campaign to unseat elected officials](#) who supported the bill and flip control of the state Senate. Democrats picked up two seats in vulnerable districts, but the effort failed to produce the sought-after Senate majority.



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A costly recall campaign against Republican Gov. Scott Walker is currently being planned. Analysts, however, warned that anti-reform activists would likely be harming their cause by waging yet another attempt at revenge. And polls show most people would be opposed to a recall.

Local union leaders are not expected to reverse the labor-day parade ban on Republicans this year. It remains unclear whether the measure will accomplish its intended objectives. What is certain, however, is that the union council has attracted even more criticism that is unlikely to end soon.

Update: Just after this article was posted, we learned that [the local unions backed down](#) after a barrage of criticism and being faced with the prospect of losing taxpayer funding for the parade. But even though Republican politicians will be allowed to attend, a statement from union boss Randy Radtke announcing the decision made it clear that they would not be welcomed with open arms. "With the track records that Pam Galloway, Sean Duffy, Scott Walker, and Jerry Petrowski have all put together this year, they should be ashamed to even show their faces at a Labor Day parade," Radtke said.

It was not immediately clear whether the affected Republicans are planning to attend.

Photo: A Marathon County Sheriff's car rides in last year's Labor Day parade in Wausau.



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